COMIC SHOP NEWS™

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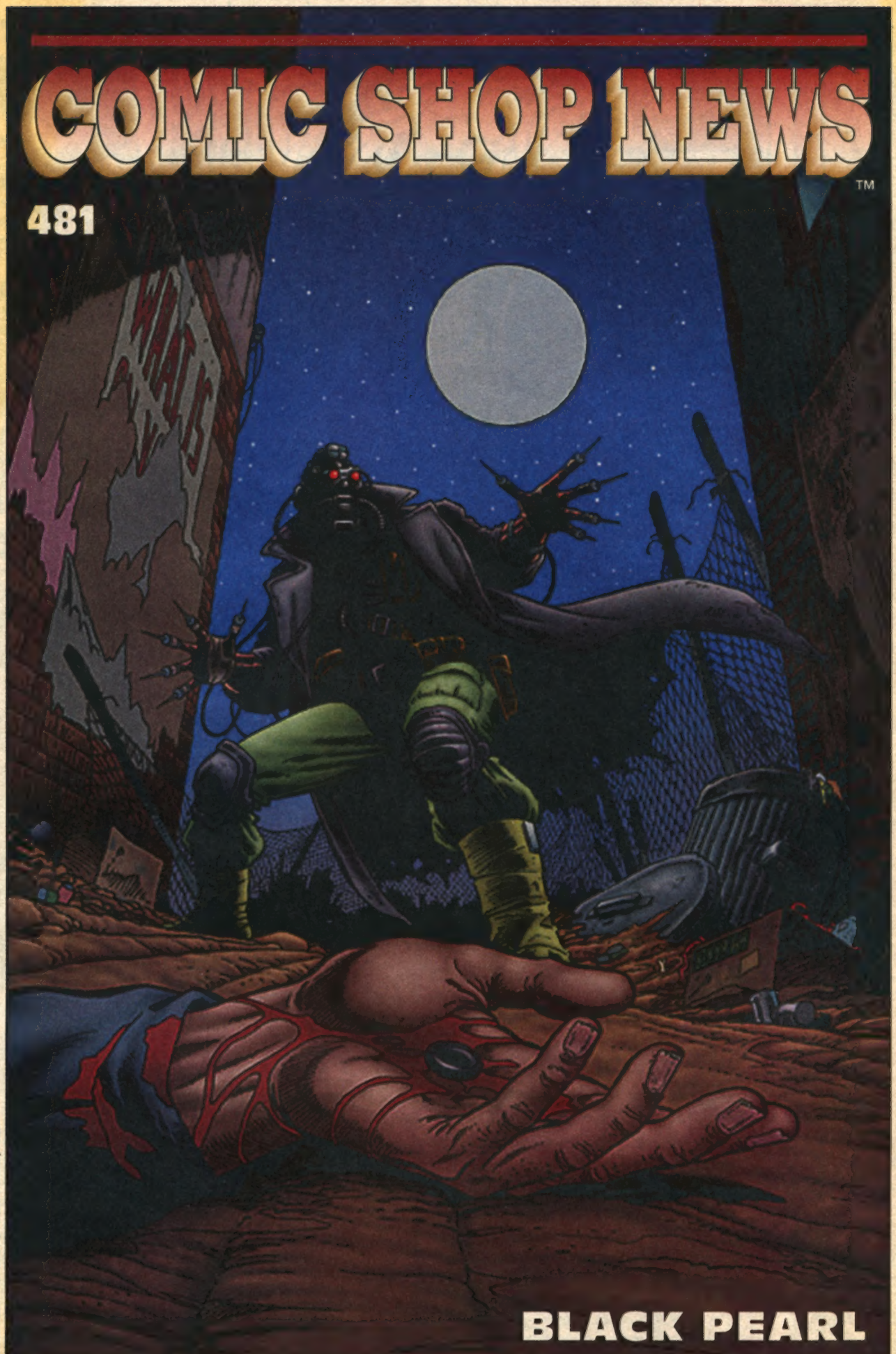

BLACK PEARL

Black Pearl ™ & ©1996 Mark Hammil, ARR.

Hamill Adds Multiple Layers to Black Pearl's Gritty Story

What makes a hero—character or circumstance? Does heroism come from a noble core in all people, or is it something less uplifting? That's a question that Mark Hamill, co-writer with Eric Johnson on ***The Black Pearl***, explores in this five-issue limited series.

"One of the things that stuck with me when I looked back on the kind of books I used to read as a kid was that it was such a commonplace premise that someone could actually become a costumed vigilante—and yet, it's something that, if it actually happened in real life, would turn out quite differently," Hamill said. "I tried to put the real-life ramifications in this story; there's no fantasy here—he doesn't have supernatural powers."

For the role of the hero, Hamill has created Luther Drake, a court stenographer. "This is just an ordinary guy—and yet, to try and find a premise in which the audience would willingly believe that this is a reasonable option for the fellow, you would have to have an extraordinary set of circumstances and an extraordinary person. So we made the character who becomes the Black Pearl very much a cypher.

"Someone who calmly types out all the words that are spoken in a courtroom, over a period of time, could amass a lot of knowledge and a lot of pent-up emotions, because he has to dispassionately categorize and record some of the saddest, most demoralizing, and most disillusioning aspects of mankind. And he'd also have that insider knowledge of the kind of deals that are cut, the kind of compromises that are made—having things thrown out on technicalities and that sort of thing. I'd find that hard to deal with..."

Luther doesn't set out to become a hero—at least not initially. Instead, he is drawn into a situation because of his interest in a woman who doesn't even know of his interest in her. "Luther's relationship with this woman resembles the relationship between a reader and a centerfold. You may have the idea that you know this person, but you've created an imaginary relationship. Luther has come upon the case of a woman on the witness protection program. Since he has access to all these computer files, and he is voyeuristic in nature, his attention is captured by this woman who is hoping to conclude an unfortunate chapter in her life. And from there, he creates a relationship that doesn't exist,:

In this regard, Hamill can draw from first-hand experience; because of his successful acting career, he has often been approached by people who feel that there is a relationship there; it's one of the drawbacks of celebrity. "I've seen this; there are probably people out there who are mad at me because I haven't answered their mail or didn't talk to them because they think they know me. But then you hear stories about stalkers; that kind of devotion can flip-flop so quickly... we all saw ***Misery***, we all saw ***Play Misty For Me***. They gave me a bodyguard right after the assassination of John Lennon; finally, though, I got so bent that I had to ultimately say, 'If you really want to get me, then buy a front-row ticket and do it.'"

When Hamill first created the story of ***The Black Pearl***, he didn't envision it as a comic book.

"This story began its life as a film script; Dark Horse saw the potential and took it on as a comic book," he said. "It was a real challenge to make it work as a comic book, though, when in fact the whole idea is why certain comic book sensibilities would not play in real life as they do in the world of comic book heroes.

"What I love about the story, in both the comic and the screenplay, is that there's an onstage and an offstage story; the audience is privy to a lot of information that the characters in the story don't know. Really, the story has a lot of meaning to me—and I know that I haven't felt this passionate about a project in many a moon.

The graphic novel will be the touchstone that we use to rewrite the screenplay one more time because we learned so much. Characters take on a life of their own, and they show you the way; there were elements that we weren't even able to get into in the miniseries that we'll touch on in the miniseries."

The Black Pearl is more than just a character study of a man who convinces himself it's a hero; it also offers a thought-provoking look at the public's fascination for tabloid journalism. "The story takes place over a brief period of time—between three and six weeks. That reflects the short attention span of the public: we get sick of Tanya and Nancy, so now we want Michael Jackson or OJ Simpson. The escapism that we need to escape from the day-to-day dreariness of our lives is disturbed when we humanize society's icons too much; it's too much information, so we move on. And I'm not lecturing as if I'm above all this; I'm perhaps the worst offender of all. It's not that I liked devoting so much of my attention to the OJ Simpson trial; it's just that the facts kept coming out, and it was all so fascinating!..."

The public response to Luther's first heroic action was inspired, at least in part, by Hamill's memory of the initial reaction to the Bernard Goetz case. "I was in New York at the tim, in previews for a musical called ***Harrigan and Hart***. One of the girls in the cast lived in Goetz's building, so I remember that story very vividly. And believe me, when you live in that city, you're so distrustful, so fearful of potential victimization, that when some poor sad sack turned the tables, there was that momentary sense of satisfaction. 'Good for him; those punks got what was coming to them.' But after that initial response came the reality of the situation; we try to follow that real-life reaction. There's no way that the entire population will hold this guy up as some kind of hero, and we show that. We focus on the devotees of this rather irresponsible guy who's fighting for his show-biz life. The story dictates, then, that his career would have to flame brightly and then burn out in a short period of time—and that's what happens."

Hamill has enjoyed his work on the limited series, but he admits that it has been extremely challenging to produce the comic book. "It's been quite an experience. Like the Broadway musical I referred to, it's so interesting because I'm out of my element here. I've never done this before. I think you sort of lose your license to criticize unless you step up to the plate yourself; I'll never look at any comic, even an issue of ***Huckleberry Hound***, the same way again.

"In comic books, you have this whole dynamic of its own," he said. "We had to make a decision whether, for instance, to have thought balloons in this piece; they don't have them in films. I remember once, in a soap opera bit, I had to prerecord a thought for the television equivalent of a thought balloon; then, in a dress rehearsal, I couldn't keep a straight face when my thoughts came booming over the speaker. It just doesn't work well on film.

"When Eric and I started on this, I wasn't sure if it was right for comics. When we committed to go ahead and do this, we realized that it could work, but it had to be told differently as a comic than it would be told as a film. We took the same premise, but we had to maximize what would work in comics and remove the things that were just totally cinematic. This isn't just an illustrated screenplay; it's the same premise, but it's constructed for comic books. For example, one of those standard sequences, where the hero's in the monster's cave, or in Darth Vader's den, just as the bad guy arrives—that's a really suspenseful moment in a film, but it doesn't work in a comic book the way it would in an extended sequence. The rules are different, and you have to tell the story differently as a result."

The Black Pearl isn't the only work that Hamill has written, although it's certainly his first work to be done for comics. "My partner, Eric Johnson—who's also my cousin—and I have several projects in the hopper, but this one seemed to be the most timely. It's of the tabloid world, so I see it being shot very much with hand-held cameras and all that. This wouldn't be a studio movie; it would have to be an independent film. What we want to do now is to have the screenplay ready to coincide with the release of the comic book.

"I think ***The Black Pearl*** has crossover appeal; I think it works well for people who are fans, but it also works very well as a quirky crime thriller. We want to show why it's so hard for someone to become a hero. It's costumed vigilantism, warts and all. Believe me, it's hard enough to climb a big wall in your street clothes; can you imagine doing it in big boots and a mask? I played the Trickster on the Flash, and it took four people to get me into and out of that one piece spandex body suit. If you need four people to help you do that, how can you become a solo costumed hero?"

How, indeed? That's the question that Luther Drake attempts to answer for himself as he ventures into the world of the costumed vigilante in this compelling miniseries. ***The Black Pearl #1***, a $2.95 comic written by Mark Hamill and Eric Johnson and illustrated by HM Baker and Bruce Patterson, is scheduled for September 18th release; be on hand to see what happens when an ordinary man begins to believe his press, convincing himself that he can become a true costumed hero.

by CLIFF BIGGERS

Mythos: A Noteworthy Horror Series

The appeal of music seems to transcend age, gender, race, religion, and economic status—and apparently, it transcends the barriers of life and death as well! In ***Mythos: The Final Tour***, a macabre new Vertigo limited series written by ***Books of Magic***'s John Ney Reiber, a musician on the verge of stardom finds that his unique musical style has attracted the attention of a most unusual fan...

Case's bizarre admirer is Pain, the "right-hand corpse of Desire" from the pages of ***The Sandman***; after hearing the hypnotic music, Pain is convinced that Case and his music can be used to bring about the end of the world as we (and REM) know it.

So how does Case feel about being approached by a member of the Endless's entourage? Well, he's accustomed to contacts with superhuman beings: since his childhood, he's heard the voice of his ghostly German grandfather, as well as that of the Norse god Odin. His music has attracted fans from beyond the fringe for quite some time. But that's not quite enough to prepare him for a face to face meeting with Pain and a group of vengeful deities including a woman made out of opium poppies, a streetwise Aztec god, and a sadistic demoness, all of whom are part of Pain's plan.

Mythos is a three-issue Vertigo series; each book will feature a different artistic team. Gary Amaro and Peter Gross supply the visuals for the debut issue; Peter Snejbjerg does the honors for ***Mythos #2***; and Teddy Kristiansen closes things out in ***Mythos #3***. Rick Berry supplies the painted covers for all three issues.

Mythos: The Final Tour #1, a $5.95 prestige-format book, is scheduled for October 23rd—and you've got a backstage pass to the strangest musical event in Vertigo history!

by ALEX KIRKLAND

COMICS BEAT NEWS
4/93
From Your Friendly Neighborhood Comics Outlet
Printed on Recycled Newsprint

Marvel Soars With Sorayama

Hajime Sorayama, like *Frank Frazetta* and *Olivia de Berardinis*, is a member of that artistic elite whose work is as much appreciated by art collectors as by fantasy and comic book fans. In books such as ***Gynoids***, Sorayama's sensual fantasy visions have captivated fans, who admire both his subject matter and his photorealistic style. Now, for the first time ever, Sorayama has created an original comic book cover painting—and Marvel Comics has it! ***Angels of Destruction***, a 48-page one-shot debuting this fall, features the Sorayama cover, which depicts some of the Ultraverse's most powerful women. These same characters are the stars of this new comic written by *Brian Michael Bendis* and illustrated by *Leonard Kirk*, *Vinton Hueck*, and *Shannon Landon Gallant*. In this dark tale, a paranormal assassin is tempted by a demonic force—but before she decides whether to succumb to the temptation, she takes a look into the hearts of some of the Ultraverse's toughest heroines, including Topaz, Shuriken, and Amber Hunt. Find out what her final decision is on October 30th, when ***Angels of Destruction***, a $2.50 comic, hits the stands.

Angels of Destruction ©1996 Marvel Comics

Give Peace a Chance

Comics focus a great deal of attention on slugfests, power struggles, wars, and devastation—but *Cindy Goff* focuses on something very different in ***Hearts of Africa: Trials***, a trade paperback compilation of her acclaimed ***Tales From the Heart of Africa #s 4-7***. This book, inspired by Goff's experiences in the Peace Corps, is the story of Cathy Grant's Peace Corps years in Africa, where she gains a new outlook on life as she learns how to survive in a place where life itself is a struggle. The result is a powerful, extremely personal story of cultural awareness and compassion that has been praised by comic fans and civilians alike. ***Hearts of Africa: Trials***, a 96-page trade paperback from Slave Labor Graphics priced at $14.95, is scheduled for October release. And for those of you who might not have sampled the first stories about Goff's Peace Corps experiences, Slave Labor is also reissuing ***Hearts of Africa: Tales From the Heart Collection #1***, reprinting those first three issues; the 80-page trade paperback, complete with an introduction by *Neil Gaiman* and cover art by *Jill Thompson*, is priced at $10.95.

A Passion For Poison

It seems to be true that most people who work in bookstores want to be writers. It's certainly true for Sherman Davies, the main character in *Alex Robinson's* ***Box Office Poison***, a new series from Antarctic Press. Davies is a bookstore clerk who hopes to be a writer; his friend Ed has ambitions to become a famous comic book artist for Zoom Comics. Their plans for the future are complicated when Sherman meets a mysterious girl on his fire escape, though... ***Box Office Poison*** may be new to comic book fans, but to readers who follow the mini-comic field, it's a well-known series, praised by such creators as *Dave Sim*, *Daniel Clowes*, and *Terry Laban*, who says that "Alex Robinson touches all the right places to create a whole cast of interesting, engaging characters." Get ready to meet some engaging new characters who may seem all too real: they'll be showing up in your local comic shop in October, when ***Box Office Poison #1***, a $3.50 40-page comic, is slated for release.

CSNsider

Warp Graphics has announced that *Wendy Pini* will begin creating new stories for the ***Elfquest*** monthly anthology title beginning with the fourth issue; her work will appear in the "Dreamtime" story arc, which deals with elfin characters who have slept in suspended animation for ten thousand years... ***Dreamwalker*** is the latest book to join Caliber's Tapestry imprint; look for the first Tapestry issue in December or January... *Jeff Mason's* Alternative Press will publish ***Shock of the Earth***, a new quarterly title by Zeric Award winner *Jon Lewis* (creator of ***True Swamp*** and ***Ghost Ship***), beginning in February of '97... WildStorm Productions has a new series of ***Gen13 Trading Cards*** in the works, featuring a veritable who's who of top comics talent; each box will include one of five oversized cards featuring storyboard art from the upcoming ***Gen13*** animated feature... Is ***Catwoman•Vampirella*** destined to join the growing list of crossover books coming up in '97? Looks very likely!... *Robert E. Howard's* Atlantean fantasy ***Kull the Conqueror***, jumps to the big screen in '97 courtesy of Universal Pictures; the film will star *Kevin Sorbo* as Kull, with Tia Carrere, *Thomas Ian Griffith*, and *Karina Lombard* in the supporting cast... ***Mad Magazine #360***, slated for early September release, will include a free bonus polybagged with every issue: a CD-ROM that will include three tracks from the new Rhino Records release, ***Mad Grooves***, a complete index of ***Mad Magazines*** from issue #1 to #349 (which will be searchable by artist, writer, title, subject matter and department), a special Mad One-Liners contest; the Mad Landfill (a full colour gallery of Mad artists' works), and some new animation featuring Alfred E. Newman and the Spies—all for the same low price of $2.50... It looks very likely that ***Babylon 5*** will once again grace the comic shop racks in 1997—although not from DC. Meanwhile, Fleer is producing a second ***Babylon 5*** trading card series... Catfish Comics, publishers of ***Sinnamon***, will become a part of Mythic Comics in the next few months... Mojo Press is publishing a collection of *Joe R. Lansale* comic adaptations and original stories entitled ***Atomic Chili: The Illustrated Joe R. Lansdale***. The 300 page trade paperback will feature almost every Lansdale comic story except those featuring other company's characters (such as Jonah Hex) or stories already available in other anthologies; look for the $24.95 book in November... ***Justice League: A Midsummer's Nightmare*** has proven so popular that both the first and the second issues have totally sold out from DC, in spite of a heavy overprinting... The Comic Cafe reports that *Jeff Smith* has announced plans to end ***Bone*** with #60, saying that by that time "he will have finished with the stories he wants to tell with those characters"... Talks are underway with *Quentin Tarantino* to produce a comic based on a concept created by the acclaimed filmmaker and offbeat actor... Upper Deck is producing a sixty-card Real Adventures of Jonny Quest series to tie in to the animated series debuting this fall on various Turner networks... ***Sailor Moon*** will appear on WTBS five days a week beginning this fall... *Bernie Wrightson* collectors take note: this fall, Sideshow Inc. is offering ***The Art of Wrightson Volume 1***, a $9.95 book featuring six pop-up 3-D versions of Wrightson illustrations... Remember those DC War comics? Apparently *Garth Ennis* does: he's working on an ***Unknown Soldier*** project as well as an ***Enemy Ace*** book; no release dates have been set yet... *B.C. Boyer* has signed an option deal with Porchlight Entertainment to help produce a cartoon series based on his ***Hilly Rose*** series, with an option for CD-ROM games... Hate to see ***Kingdom Come*** conclude? Well, here's something you can look forward to: *Alex Ross* reports that he and *Mark Waid* are working on an epilogue to the series, although no release date has been set yet...

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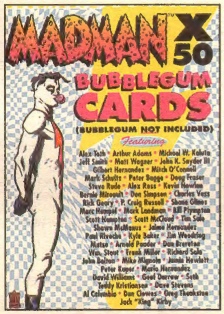
Frazetta's Mad About Allred's Madman

Michael Allred has attracted quite a few fans with his decidedly offbeat Madman, a hero with a decidedly non-heroic approach to his costumed duties. In the past few years, Madman has secured his position as a cult favorite, earning praise from a wide range of writers and artists—but there are still some surprises out there in the Madman fan gallery. Like who, you ask? Well, howsabout the famous *Frank Frazetta*, who supplies a back cover painting for ***Madman Comics #11***, the end-of-the-Madman-hiatus return issue. If you can quit gazing at the stunning Frazetta painting, you'll find an intriguing tale inside as Joe, Gale, Mott, and the rest of Madman's pals try to figure out how to snap him out of his dazed existence on the streets of Snap City (How'd he get there? A cranial convergence with Dr. Boiffard will do it to you every time!). ***Madman Comics #11***, a $2.95 book by *Michael Allred* with colors by *Laura Allred*, is slated for October 2nd release.

And speaking of Frank Frazetta and Madman, Frazetta's Madman art is also featured in ***Madman X 50 Bubblegum Card Set: The Sequel***, a second series of fifty Madman images by some of those many artists who are also Madman fans, including *Matt Groening*, *Joe Kubert*, and the aforementioned Frank Frazetta. The back of each card features a brief background on the artist as well as a piece of a larger image that fits together to form an all-new, giant Madman illustration by Mike Allred. ***Madman X 50 Bubblegum Card Set: The Sequel***, packaged in a box illustrated by Allred himself, is priced at $14.95; look for it, too on October 2nd.


MADMAN X 50
BUBBLEGUM CARDS
(BUBBLEGUM NOT INCLUDED)
Featuring
Alex Toth • Arthur Adams • Michael W. Kaluta
Jeff Smith • Matt Wagner • John K. Snyder III
Robert Crumb • Michael Lark • Sergio Aragonés
Mark Schultz • Peter Bagge • Doug Fenner
Steve Rude • Alex Ross • Kevin Nowlan
Bernie Wrightson • Dan Simpson • Charles Vess
Rick Geary • P. Craig Russell • Skottie Young
Matt Howarth • Mark Landman • Bill Plympton
Scott Hampton • Scott McCloud • Jim Sola
Shawn McManus • Adam Hughes
Paul Rivoche • Kyle Baker • Jim Woodring
Ranma ½ • Arnold Pander • Dan Brereton
Wm. Stout • Frank Miller • Richard Sala
John Bolton • Mike Mignola • Jamie Hewlett
Peter Kuper • Mark Nagelmann
David Williams • Geof Darrow • Seth
Bobby Kristiansen • Dave Stevens
Al Columbia • Dan Clowes • Doug Rawlinson
Jack "King" Kirby

Madman X 50 Bubblegum Cards ©1996 Mike Allred

There's a Lot at Stake in Spawn the Impaler

Spawn fans have had to be satisfied with one ***Spawn*** title for over four years now—but beginning with this fall's debut of ***Curse of the Spawn***, there's a Spawnucopia of material in the works, including a miniseries both written and illustrated by a major comics creator who's never before tried his hand at a Spawn tale.

Spawn "The Impaler," a three-issue miniseries that begins in the time of Vlad (Dracula) Tepes and continues into the near future, focuses not on evil and depravity, but on the power of love. The series marks the Spawn debut of writer/penciller *Mike Grell*, well known to fans for his work on ***Maggie the Cat, Jon Sable, and Shaman's Tears;*** for this project, Grell is joined by ***Star Wars*** and ***X-Files*** poster artist *Rob Prior*, who supplies the fully painted finishes on top of Grell's pencil art. This makes ***Spawn "The Impaler"*** the first-ever fully painted Spawn saga—but you can bet that it won't be the last. ***Spawn "The Impaler" #1***, a $2.95 comic, is scheduled for October release.

A Crypt-ic Offering

Forget those decrepit looking horror hosts—wouldn't you enjoy tales of the macabre a bit more if you had a... shall we say more *voluptuous* character to front those stories? If the answer is yes, then Sirius Comics has just the book for you: ***Crypt of Dawn***, a macabre anthology featuring a stunning Dawn cover by acclaimed artist *Joseph M. Linsner*. Inside, readers will see the return of Linsner's nihilistic vampire Esque, along with Rhyder by the *Fillbach Brothers* and Tombstone Girls by *Robb Horan* and *Saverio Tenuta*; each story has a decidedly *outré* edge, as the title might indicate. ***Crypt of Dawn #1***, a full color comic priced at $2.95, is scheduled for October release.

A Storm Is Coming...

Fans owe *Jeff Smith*, creator of ***Bone***, a tip of the hat and a hearty thanks; not only has Smith allowed fans to catch up on the Bone backstory via multiple reprintings of the early issues, but he has also continued to make those early issues available in handsome, affordably priced anthology volumes. This October, the third of those volumes, ***Bone Volume Three: Eyes of the Storm***, is slated for release; this book reprints ***Bone #s 13-18***, revealing the secrets of Thorn's past and completing the first trilogy of the Bone saga. Fans who already have these tales may want to take a look at this collection too: not only does it feature five new pages of story, but it also features several new illustrations by Jeff Smith. ***Bone Volume Three: Eyes of the Storm*** is slated for both hardcover ($24.95) and trade paperback ($16.95) release from Cartoon Books; look for both editions in October.

IF THE SUIT MAKES THE MAN...
...WHAT IF THE MAN'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH?
X-O MANOWAR
all-new action by
mark waid & brian augustyn
sean chen & tom ryder
ACCLAIM COMICS VALIANT HEROES
same as it never was
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Need some help sorting through the stacks of comic books on the stands each month as you search for something worth reading? Well, let *CSN* eliminate the chaff from the wheat for you! Each month, Cliff (in plain type) and Brett (*in italic type*) sort through stacks of upcoming releases in search of those titles that deserve some extra attention. If you're looking for killer reviews of bad books, we advise that you look elsewhere; we'd rather give the column inches to books that deserve praise or extra attention instead of tying up space with reviews that skewer disappointing comics.

Publishers interested in having their books considered for review in this column should send advance xeroxes to *CSN Give & Take*, 2770 Carillon Crossing, Marietta GA 30066. We'd prefer to receive copies at least thirty days prior to the book's release.

At the end of the reviews, we also offer a one to five star rating for each title, with both Cliff's and Brett's ratings listed. Since we make a point to devote space only to books that deserve the attention, this rating offers readers a handy means to weigh the merits of each title. Here's the scale:

★	Adequate reading, worth the cover price
★★	Entertaining material that shows promise
★★★	Good stuff that's worth a close look
★★★★	Primo reading; don't pass it up
★★★★★	You don't find comics better than this; *creme de la creme*

Ever thought about how common the lost child plot is in children's literature? ***Peter Pan, The Wizard of Oz, Alice In Wonderland***—almost all of them focus on a child separated from his or her parents, a child whose life becomes a grand adventure as he/she strives to return home. In some stories, the child makes it; in a few, the child never completes the journey (and what a frightening concept that could be to a child!).

Reading Gary and Rhoda Shipman's ***Pakkins' Land #1*** brought some of these questions to mind. The book is a well-crafted tale of (bet you can guess what's coming up) a young boy, Paul, who gets lost in a strange world where the animals are like animals in our world... sort of.

In the world of ***Pakkins' Land***, there are a few noticeable differences. For one thing, the lions are much smaller there, and quite friendly. The bears are amiable. And all the animals talk.

But not all of them are friendly. Lions and Bears are, but not Tigers.

Pakkins' Land is a fantasy title that kicks off Caliber Comics' new Tapestry imprint of all-ages books. It's a very impressive beginning for the line; it's a fantasy first cousin to the works of L. Frank Baum and C.S. Lewis, built around animal personalities that are sometimes archetypal, sometimes quite out of character. And, of course, it focuses on a young boy who hopes to find his way home with the help of the animals who have taken him as their friend.

I felt the strongest influence for this book was C.S. Lewis. Throughout the first story, I was constantly reminded of Narnia. ***Pakkins' Land*** *fits into this genre wonderfully, and left me with the same warm quality that I felt when reading the Narnia novels the first time.*

I didn't get the Narnia feel as strongly—but a lot of that may be attributed to my late discovery of those novels. But it's interesting that we both find it easier to compare this series to novels than to compare it to another comic book series.

In a comic parallel it's much more difficult to find a comparable title. I guess the closest in tone is ***Bone****, but it isn't a close comparison.* ***Pakkins' Land*** *is title of its own.*

The art for this series is quite simple and bold in its appearance, built around a strong, confident line. The most satisfying pages spring full-blown from the imagination of the artist; the only jarring pages that don't work for me are those that are obviously taken from nature photography, burying the art style beneath a nature-realism that seems out of place. I hope that, as the series progresses, the Shipmans will move even more towards their own art style and away from these photo references; they aren't necessary, and I think they actually hold back a delightful adventure the same way a realistically-drawn character would look out of place in a Disney animated adventure.

Pakkins' Land is a fantasy that taps into that focuses not on separation but on the magic and adventure of the land in which Paul finds himself. Don't think this is a vanilla book, though, filled with nothing but natural sweetness and light; a grand adventure awaits Paul and the reader, filled with threats and challenges. I plan on tagging along for the whole trek...

Pakkins' Land
Cliff ★★
Brett: ★★★★

There are few artists that can compare with Barry Windsor-Smith. He has been dazzling us with his

READY OR NOT GUYS, HERE COMES THE FISH.
O.K. MR. BRAMBLES I'M READY.
Pakkins' Land
©1996 Gary and Rhoda Shipman
JIZ! I'M REALLY TAKING A BEATING HERE.
AND I HAVEN'T GOT A JAB IN, YET!
I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THIS!
YOU THROW DOWN YOUR SWORD?
YOU CONCEDE TO ME?!
KNOW YOU, THEN--- YOUR VAUNTED NAME WILL BE AS MUD UNDER MY BOOT! NOW IT IS ARGOR FOR WHOM THE CROWDS WILL CHEER!
ARGOR WHO WILL--
UKK!
SOK!
GIVE IT A REST, WILLYA?
NOW YOU GO BACK TO KALIF-ANUK AND TELL HIM AXUS SAID "THANKS FOR THE GOLD!"
Uhn--
OH, AN' MENTION HOW THE OLD MAN DROPPED YOU WITH ONE PUNCH!
Barry Windsor-Smith: Storyteller #1
©1996 BWS

visuals for over two decades now, and, if anything, he has only gotten better.

Case in point: ***Barry Windsor-Smith: Storyteller.*** *This new series captures Smith in several different lights. Over a year ago Smith announced that he was going to be producing his own line of comics, and that promise has now come to pass, but not in the way that many people assumed.* ***Barry Windsor-Smith: Storyteller*** *is an anthology title that features three different stories, all written and pencilled by Smith, with art assists form several other talents. Each story is strong enough to land its own book, but Smith has combined them together to create one action packed series.*

One one level, I like the anthology approach—after all, it gives us several different Windsor-Smith concepts to enjoy. AT the same time, I think I would have been happy with a larger helping of any one of these series. Then again, if my biggest complaint is that there's too much variety in this book, then I guess I should be very happy with my options.

The first option in ***Storyteller*** *is the* ***Freebooters*** *storyline. This is the story of an innocent young warrior who has come to save the world—but to do so he needs the help of one of the greatest warriors in history, who turns out to be a roughhousing drunk. If this sounds familiar, then you are probably right on the money.* ***Freebooters*** *reads a lot like* ***Archer and Armstrong: The Fantasy Series.*** *Actually, the premise seems to fit a little better in this fantasy world, as the innocent character seems far more out of place than the rough and ready sort.*

I also find a lot of the early Conan in this book's tone and style.

Still, like the earlier ***Archer & Armstrong*** *series,* ***Freebooters*** *has a wonderful light-hearted sense that keeps you smiling for the entire issue.*

Paradox Man *is the second offering in the book. This is the story of a man who finds a time machine, and takes a trip back to a world that is dominated by dinosaurs and a strange alien culture. The guy has no idea what is happening to him, and quickly falls to the aliens, but whether they mean his harm or not remains to be seen. This is obviously the story that Smith wants to use to help him draw a variety of subjects. While entertaining enough, it doesn't hold up as well as* ***Freebooters*** *and* ***Young Gods.***

You think not? It was my second favorite feature in the book—but then again, I've always had a soft spot for time-travel tales. Still, I found the character appealing enough that I'm looking forward to future installments of this series.

Speaking of ***Young Gods,*** *that is the name of the third chapter of Storyteller. This is a great little story that seems perfect for the anthology style story. This is the story of, as the title suggests, a group of young gods that have to come into their roles—eventually. These kids are far more interested in their own lives than they are responsibility, and you can tell very quickly that this is going to be a lot of fun. Smith dedicates this series to Jack Kirby—obviously a tip of the hat to the* ***New Gods****—and does The King proud. These are the most developed characters of the series, and they appear to have the most potential.*

A lot of potential, but not quite as much appeal for me—but the Kirbyesque tone is evident throughout.

There is something for everyone in this series. A bit of science-fiction, fantasy, and heroics, all blended together in one title. That is generally what an anthology title is supposed to do, but it is hard to maintain quality in an anthology. But unlike most anthologies, all of this series is being done by Smith. Make no mistakes, the true star of this book is Smith's incredible artwork. He is one of the best that has ever worked in the field, and he really does just seem to be getting better. I hope that he continues ***Storyteller*** *for a very long time to come.*

Barry Windsor-Smith: Storyteller #1
Cliff ★★★
Brett: ★★★

Fax From Sarajevo is one of the most powerful comics that most people won't read. I wish it weren't true, but alas, I suspect it is. There are no costumed heroes and cosmic struggles to captivate the superhero fan. There are no high-tech weapons and grand battles to appeal to the war comic fan. There are no horrifying, grotesque depictions of the horrors or war to intrigue the splatter fans. There are no rugged heroes standing alone against the world to interest the noir comic fan.

So what is there? There is stunning Joe Kubert art, for one. There is a war—not a nuts-and-bolts World War II story, but a much less glorified war in Bosnia. And there are characters—powerful, frustrated, often impotent characters struggling to stay live in a world turned upside down by war—who make this story phenomenally powerful... and it's even more powerful, because it's real.

Fax From Sarajevo is the compelling story of Ervin Rustemagic's unflagging efforts to extricate himself and his family from the devastations of Sarajevo. It's an incredibly frustrating, painful tale filled with failure after failure, with injustice and callousness and ignorance. And it's all too true, which makes it even more incredible.

You called this story powerful. If anything, that is an understatement. I was not ready to read this book when I started it, but after I started it, I was captivated; I literally could not set the book down.

My reaction exactly. I picked up this massive 200+ page story on a Sunday evening when I had a dozen other things to do; everything else had to wait, though, until I finished this compelling story.

The chilling knowledge that this isn't a work of fiction, that these faxes are real things sent between artists from the other side of the world, makes this an unbelievable read. You turn page after page, never knowing what to expect, but always wanting to know what happens.

On one level, you want this to be a work of fiction, because the reality of the situation leads to feelings of anger and frustration at the world's unwillingness to humanize the atrocities of Bosnia-Herzegovina. We all heard daily reports of the shelling, the snipers, the mortars, the bombs... but this story makes it all too clear that there were people on the receiving end of the bullets and the shrapnel, that there was blood in the streets and on the walls.

Earlier this summer, America was fascinated by an image of a world devastated by a powerful alien invader in ***Independence Day.*** ***Fax From Sarajevo*** accomplishes what that story never did: it makes us realize that most of the victims of a war have virtually no power to change the course of events by themselves; they only have a desire to survive, no matter what they must endure.

This is a book guaranteed to make readers angry. At times, it almost seems too repetitious that Ervin faces setback after setback in his struggle to get free from this war—but remember, this isn't a moral tale, this is Kubert's retelling of the reality that Ervin and his family

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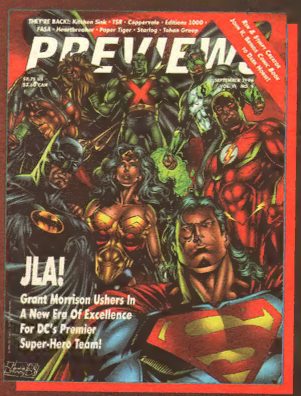
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endured, and every repetitive setback that we read about was a nightmarish ordeal that the Rustemajiks experienced.

I never expected the nightmares that these people faced. I don't consider myself an ignorant man, but I felt like an idiot reading the events the transpired in Sarajevo. A chilling, disturbing, and inspiring tale.

But as I said, I suspect that most people will never read this book. It's not the sort of book that most readers will rally behind. I hope, though, that every one of you will do your best to prove me wrong.

Fax From Sarajevo
Cliff ★★★★
Brett: ★★★★★

Batman isn't the only hero from DC with an animated series. Starting this fall, Superman gets his own animated book, and you know what that means: a comic with the word Adventure is in the works.

*That title (since there already is an **Adventures of Superman**) is **Superman Adventures**. The first issue of the book is being handled by the shows head writer Paul Dini, and if this is any indication of how the show is going to be, then I'm really looking forward to this show.*

But boy, isn't that one big chin on the Man of Steel!...

I remember reading that the people behind the show were going to try to capture the flavor of the old Fleischer animated features, and it very much seems that they have done just that. The comic reads like a book based on the world that the Fleischer's used so many years ago, except that everything has been updated to match the current standing in the Superman mythos. Everything seems just right, from Lex Luthor's villainy to Superman's cutting jaw. Heck, even Lois seems to have the right combination of sassy and sexy, with a lot of brains behind it all. I really can't find any problem with the book. Oh sure, the plot is a little simplistic, having Superman beat up a robot that Luthor has made, but it was the flavor that carried the book, not the plot.

Let's see: Fleischer style and current continuity. Yep, that's a combination I can enjoy. And fans who complain about the serialized nature of the Superman books will find an alternative here. The art is obviously animation-influenced, but I don't have a problem with that; it's a very clean, polished style that doesn't detract from the stories.

The art is by Rick Burchett and Terry Austin., who turn out a great looking book, and I can only assume that it is going match the animated series perfectly.

*I am having all sorts of problems coming up with problems with this title—except for the strange fascination with the Adventure title for the title. Maybe it's just nostalgia, or maybe it's the idea that this show will match the quality of Batman. Hey, I still love the **Batman Adventures** comic, so this one only seemed a natural to enjoy **Superman Adventures**.*

Superman Adventures #1
Cliff ★★★
Brett: ★★★

If you have fond memories of Indiana Jones... if you enjoyed the adventures of the Phantom on screen earlier this year... then I have just the book for you!

Blackjack, Alex Simmons and Joe Bennett's new book from Dark Angel Productions, is a fast-paced pulpish world-spanning adventure tale that jumps from scene to scene at an almost breakneck pace, setting up a battle of vengeance and justice The story begins in the Sahara in 1918, moving quickly to New York and Egypt of the 1930's, evoking the pulpish feel of popular literature and films of the time.

I was shocked at the short, choppy beginning of this book. I thought that the whole book was going to be like this, but as the issue progressed, I saw the direction it was headed and started to take in the whole picture.

And I guess this a commentary on the fact that the world isn't colorblind: many people are surprised to learn, when I tell them about this book, that the hero of this book is a black man.

Hey, I'm color blind. What's the big deal?

Fax From Sarajevo
WHY ARE THEY DOING THIS, PAPA? THE AIRPLANES MAKE SUCH A NOISE...WHY?
I-I... DON'T KNOW, EDVIN.
DON'T THEY KNOW THEY FRIGHTEN US? SO WE MUST HIDE IN THE CELLAR.
DO THEY WANT TO HURT US, PAPA?
Superman Adventures #1
LUTHOR, HERE, GENERAL, THE SUPERMAN THREAT HAS BEEN NEUTRALIZED.
UH, LEX? LEX!
"IN THE ARMY... FIGHTING SEEMED TO MERELY BEGIN THE INEVITABLE. SHOCKS SPLIT FLESH WITH A SWIFT, SILENT EASE. BULLETS SHATTER BONES AND DREAMS.
THE SLAUGHTERED SCREAM IN DEFIANCE, IN FEAR, IN AGONY.
Blackjack 1

No, not red-green color blind... oh, never mind...

Simmons and Bennett have constructed an adventure tale with a rugged, two-gunned, wealthy, dynamic black hero set in a time when blacks weren't cast in this sort of heroic role. But while race—and the inevitable racism of the era is an important aspect of this story, Simmons and Bennett make it clear that adventure transcends race.

Oh, that type of color. I still don't see what the big deal is, though...

That's the point: it isn't a big deal *now*, although it would have been a very big deal *then*.

I was particularly pleased with the rapid-fire transitions of time and place in the first few pages of the book, evoking the feel of a well-edited film. Simmons has a strong sense of pacing, and he's aware how important this fast-pace and jump-cut quality was to pulp adventures in both print and film.

As I said, this was a little jarring for me at first, but I quickly became accustomed to it. This was a well paced work.

Joe Bennett's art isn't the typical fine-line over-rendered flavor of the month; he has a strong sense of weight and shadow that will bring inevitable comparisons to Alex Toth, Milt Caniff, and some of the better European comic artists. And while sometimes he sacrifices a bit more detail than he should, he has such a strong sense of design that the story works nonetheless—and the color pages that I've seen in xerox make it clear that J. Brown, the colorist, has a keen sense of what Bennett is trying to accomplish visually, and the colors complement and enhance the art rather than competing with it.

Blackjack is going to evoke inevitable comparisons to Indiana Jones films; ironically, this book is better than any Indiana Jones comic I've read since John Byrne tried his hand at the Man With The Hat. If, like me, you've been disappointed with the Indiana Jones adventures in comics form, give ***Blackjack*** a try; I think you'll be much happier.

Blackjack 1
Cliff ★★★
Brett: ★★

When the DC and Marvel universe were separated once again a few months ago—after being joined so forcefully—everyone assumed that the story was over.

Wrong.

***DC/Marvel:** All Access is a book that is just that: all about Access. In case you forgot, Access is the character who was created in the big crossover series. His power is the ability to travel freely between the worlds, and safeguard them from each other. How convenient that would be if you wanted to do a series of crossover books...*

Wow—it's almost as if someone had planned it in advance, isn't it? Of course, the character also offers fans access to a lot of very popular superhero parings...

*Such as the one in the first issue of **All Access:** a meeting of two old friends, Superman and Spider-Man. This time around, they have to deal with a villain from only one of their universes: Venom. The big problem with using Venom against Superman is what would happen on page two?*

Hey, maybe he's still tired from ***Final Night!***... It's the only explanation I can come up with for Venom being any more than a black splotch after a page...

*It's not a totally convincing meeting. Still, writer Ron Marz is familiar enough with both universes to keep this conflict interesting. Ron Marz is a great choice for the writer on this book, as he has written extensively for both companies, and was one of the writers for the **DC Versus Marvel** series of last year.*

The art is by Jackson Guice and Joe Rubinstein,

who are equally good choices. Guice has been a regular penciller for both companies—and even the regular artist for a ***Superman*** *title at DC. These guys earned their wings a long time ago, and they do all the characters proud in this book.*

And as much as I likeJ the Jurgens and Castellini art in the *DC Vs. Marvel* series, I'd rather have a single artist for the entire series rather than alternating chapters.

I was thrilled to see something following up the terrific ***DC Versus Marvel*** *series. This is only a four issue series, but it's more than I was expecting to see at this time. What's more, it appears that there will be an internal plot to this book, dealing with the Access character, his life, and how his life affects others. (Can anyone say Dr. Strange?) The first issue of* ***All Access*** *was a lot of fun, and issue two will bring us Robin and Jubilee. The fun should continue, and I'm looking forward to it.*

DC/Marvel: All Access #1
Cliff ★★
Brett: ★★★

Is Hal Jordan about to become a casualty in the DC Universe? It certainly looks that way, based on what DC has said about the Final Night storyline and the upcoming ***Green Lantern #81.*** And while I certainly am aware that DC could surprise us still, I have to say that ***Parallax: Emerald Night,*** the special Hal Jordan tie-in one-shot that's so important to the Green Lantern mythos and the ***Final Night*** storyline, is a wonderful restoration of the nobility that was stripped away from Hal Jordan a while back.

I'm one of those original hardcore DC Silver Age fan who remembers buying the ***Showcase*** issues and the early Gil Kane issues; who remembers the gradual expansion of the supporting cast to include John Stewart and Guy Gardner (and at the time, we never thought we'd see either again); who remembers the surprising change that occurred when Green Lantern and Green Arrow set out on an odyssey together. And while I've enjoyed Kyle Rayner's time as Green Lantern, I've always felt like Hal Jordan was sent away with a bit less dignity and honor than he deserved.

With ***Parallax: Emerald Night,*** Hal's dignity and honor is restored. Ron Marz, Mike McKone, and Mark McKenna have forced Hal Jordan to confront his demons, and what emerges is a hero with a sense of purpose.

I agree. While I think that Hal made a good villain, he wasn't the type of villain that you could hate. This put him in a bad position. He wasn't a good guy gone bad, he was a good guy who was pushed too far. A lot of people felt that this just didn't fit with Hal's character. So be it. Those fans—and even someone like me, who didn't mind the change—will love the dignity that he shows in facing himself and the situation that he has created for himself.

It is a problem when you create a sympathetic villain; when the heroes win, they come across looking excessively cruel or brutal. This book offers DC a way out of the Hal Jordan dilemma—and while it isn't a solution that all Hal fans are going to like, it's one that I find more suitable than the ongoing Hal-as-villain plot string that's been left dangling.

Now if this were a Western, it would end with him strapping on the gun-belt and preparing to face the overwhelming odds that await him in the center of town at high noon. What awaits Hal Jordan may be just as menacing; I don't know that for sure. But I do know that Ron Marz has given Hal Jordan a moment of glory that makes him a better character, no matter what happens. And for that, I thank him.

Parallax: Emerald Night
Cliff ★★★★
Brett: ★★★

It shouldn't be any surprise to discover that both Cliff and Myself are fans of the ***X-Files*** *(though I would say Cliff is a bigger fan than I)...*

Of course—after all, if it involves conspiracies and UFO's and the paranormal, you know it's right up my alley...

I think it also isn't a surprise that we are both ***Animaniacs*** *fans (and I'm the more dedicated fan in that area). Quid Pro Quo, it makes sense that we are going to like* ***Animaniacs #19.***

DC•Marvel: All Access #1
Parallax: Emerald Night
GKK
AHHK!
NOW I SUDDENLY FIND MYSELF AIMLESS.
AND WHAT HAVE I TRULY ACCOMPLISHED, EXCEPT ANOTHER DEATH? I DON'T REGRET ENDING THE CYBORG'S LIFE. IT WAS A DESERVED FATE.
BUT I'M ALSO AWARE SUCH AN ACT WAS ONCE UNTHINKABLE TO ME. WHAT KIND OF HERO KILLS HIS ENEMY? WHAT KIND OF HERO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF HIS FRIENDS?
SAY, WHO'S THE GUY WITH ALL THE DETAIL?
OH, SWELL! YOUR FIRST DRIVING LESSON AND YOU HIT SOMEONE! YOU BETTER NOT DO THAT ON YOUR TEST!
HE'S CUTE! A GIRL COULD REALLY FALL FOR A WOUNDED PUPPY DOG FACE LIKE THAT.
THE WORLD FADED TO BLACK AND I BEGAN TO DREAM OF SHEEP...
Animaniacs 19

Animaniacs #19 features the a story called The Y-Files. It features some very familiar characters who go by the names of Fox Mouldy and Dana Scowly. These two are investigators for the FBI, who are trying to explain some strange things—like how the water tower disappeared from the Warner Brothers lot. Okay, I think we see where this is going. Mouldy find the Warner boys—and girl—and has a close encounter. Scowly doesn't show up until after they've left, keeping in the flavor of the book. The basic ***X-Files*** *story, with great witty banter by writer Dave King.*

I enjoyed the Y-Files story, even though the title reminded me of a very entertaining web page called The Why Files, that tries to explain supposed anomalous incidents, rumors, etc. But I digress...

Many satires are so heavy-handed that they only hint at the subject of the work being satirized, not the tone. That's not the case here; Dave King obviously knows his ***X-Files.***

Now, what makes this work so well is that the artwork is done by ***X-Files*** *artist Charles Adlard. The characters of Mouldy and Scowly look perfect, and he draws the most insanely moody Animaniacs that you can imagine. The visuals in this book are hilarious, and well worth the price of admission.*

If you are a fan of ***Animaniacs,*** *then you are probably already going to pick up this issue. If you are a fan of* ***X-Files,*** *then you are going to want to hunt this book down. Too much fun, in too few pages.*

Animaniacs #19
Cliff ★★★
Brett: ★★★

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